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## 8th-graders look to their futures

BY MICHOLYN FAJEN • REGISTER CORRESPONDENT • FEBRUARY 15, 2008

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It's an eye-opener for some and for others it unveils what they have known for a long time.

In preparation for their futures, students at Waukee's Prairieview School are required to complete career class to help gauge their interests and skills early on and develop appropriate pathways as they enter high school - and the outcomes have surprised some.

The semester-long class taught to eighth-graders by Sheila Allen was added to district curriculum two years ago aligning with the state requirement that students must have a four-year-high school plan in place by eighth grade.



The career class works extensively with National Career Assessment Services Inc. in Adel and the Kuder System, which provides extended tools and resources for students even after they complete the class.

Through interest assessment testing, class activities and projects, students begin to define in which industries or fields they could shine.

"This is the point in a student's development where they begin to consider interest inventories and skill assessments. Through discussion and reflection, they then decide what they need to do in four-year planning for grades 9 through 12 to improve skills and highlight areas of interest as it relates to future education and ultimately employment," said Brad Buck, assistant superintendent for school improvement for the district.

Waukee eighth-grader Alex Moots, 14, of West Des Moines said she was feeling the pressure of a career as early as seventh grade.

"I felt like I should know what I want to do, but at that time I didn't know. The class helped me narrow down my path based on what I'm interested in. It explains the jobs within that field," said Alex, who after the results from her assessment is steering herself and her class selections in high school toward business, arts and communications.

The class focuses on self-discovery as students begin to understand how their personality, skills and values mold in to a better-fitting career. Results are not always predictable.

Allen said a former student, now in high school, displayed characteristics and a personality best used in teaching. "When I suggested teaching he was so against the idea. Recently I ran into him and he said he'd re-thought the idea and might pursue it."

Waukee High School freshman, Jonny Getting, 15, of Waukee said he's always had a big interest in sports, whether coaching or becoming an athletic director. But Getting said the class also introduced another fit: public relations.

"I had no idea that existed as an option, and I knew nothing about it," said Getting. "The class helped me see the wide range of possibilities within my interests and helped me look at the different colleges that will help me get there. It's opened doors for me."

From a practical standpoint, Buck said eighth grade is a transition from our middle school scheduling, which like most places is largely guided by the district since the choices are limited to band and choir to more of an elective scheduling in which a transcript of courses begins to be generated. The career class allows students to use those electives to test their interests.

Freshman Erin Larson of Clive took the class last year and said her interest assessment test pointed her in the exact direction she'd dreamed of her whole life: the arts cluster of careers.

"It was so obvious for me for so long. I love to dance and I want to be a Rockette someday," said Larson.

But the class also helped position her for success. "Mrs. Allen helped me chart how I will get there by encouraging me to join the high school show choir and try out for dance teams, but also to go to college because I won't be able to dance forever."

Brooke Denny, 13, of Clive took the class last semester. The eighth-grader has developed her four-year plan to include more sociology and psychology classes after her assessment pointed her toward social and communications jobs.

"I'm interested in helping special-needs kids and in the class I learned there are all kinds of jobs for that field, one-on-one associates, respite in-home nurses and more," Brooke said.



CONRAD SCHMIDT/REGISTER PHOTOS

Students sort through magazines for a project during career class at Prairieview School in Waukee. The course teaches them about their interests and passions and points them to careers they might enjoy.



Jason Zentz, 13, left, and Jack Oberman, 13, work together sorting through magazines for a project during career class at Prairieview School.



A.J. Rich, 13, of Waukee sorts through magazines for his project. Career class helps students learn what they can do to help prepare for their future.

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The assessment resources are helping eighth-grader Kara Matheson, 13, of Waukee locate colleges in her interest areas.

"I'm interested in neonatology. Now I can go to the Kuder Web site, plug that in and it will tell me the right colleges for that," said Kara, adding that money does not yet play a large part in her career choice. "I'm more interested in doing something I like right now."

While the Waukee school district has offered career class for many years, this is only the second year of the "revamped curriculum" and the four-year plan.

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